

How to Efficiently Improve our Contact Center

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## Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to review our current processes and develop a way to efficiently improve our customer contact center. The South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles (SCDMV) customer contact center is commonly the first point of contact for many SCDMV customers. Our job is to respond to customer inquiries about SCDMV products and services.

To start we need to identify challenges to achieve our purpose of improvement and greater efficiencies in the Contact Center. The main challenge the Contact Center is currently facing is staffing. Due to a high turnover rate and employees' poor attendance habits our ability to meet call volume demands is greatly inhibited. The high turnover rate has changed our Contact Center from a once highly experienced staff to a staff of new employees with very little experience.

Coaching and training these new employees is difficult due to the high number of customer calls. Balancing production and assisting agents throughout the day is a challenge. Our wait time sometimes exceeds 30 minutes on our call-in option (customers that go straight to a live agent), and over an hour with our call-back option (customers leaves their phone number and we call them back).

These longer wait times for customers can be attributed to the call center agent's lack of knowledge to handle the calls efficiently. Training in our department has not been evaluated for effectiveness for some time; it is imperative that we review and develop an effective training program. In my opinion, the Contact Center holds a golden opportunity for employees to obtain the most DMV knowledge of any department in our agency due to the large variety of customer

inquiries. These interactions will produce productive and knowledgeable employees if we can retain them.

### Problem Statement

Our goal is to answer 100% of our customer calls in under 15 minutes after the call begins. This is required while assisting as many as 5,000 customers per day.

Our current staffing challenges consist of:

- Employees absent from work
- Employees not retaining information during training due to the material and the length of the training program
- Not enough employees staffed to handle the call volume we receive daily. We have higher-than-normal volumes and low staffing causing our service level to drop to 65%.
- We offer a call back option, but the volume of customers taking that option causes the queues to fill.

The goal of this project is to:

- Analyze data collected by our phone system provider, SEGRA.
- Address Staffing issues
- Address Training issues
- Minimize customer wait time that will play a part in currently staffed agents being able to take more calls

- Phone system issues, improvement

### Data Collection

I have collected data using our current phone system provider, SEGRA. The reports capture the number of calls received, answered, staffing, and service level. The *service level* is used as our main measurement for the Contact Center. We have defined two service level standards in the Contact Center. The service level set for accountability to our customers states that we will answer our customers calls within 15 minutes of them calling in. The service level set for our agents is to handle 80% of their calls within five minutes. The agents' service level is measured by the amount of calls an agent completes within five minutes divided by the actual amount of calls the agent has taken for the day. This is provided on the SEGRA Agent Activity Report, see appendix A-1.

In October 2021, we started taking a different approach for agent expectations. Rather than focusing on a service level, we were monitoring the number of calls an agent takes a day also seen in appendix A-3. I have seen significant improvement on my team by changing that expectation. The service level approach seems to overwhelm agents and had them rushing customers off the phone to handle their call within five minutes.

I have collected data from one of my seasoned agents. He has been employed with us since 12/18/2018 and is one of our top performers handling vehicle related calls. He averages 100 or more calls a day within service level of 80%. I feel it's best to use a high performer as an example of what a skilled agent can accomplish. Once fully staffed to our capacity of 66 agents

and trained, we can reach our goal of helping no less than 5,000 callers a day. Due to a fourth of our current staff being new this causes longer wait times for customers which minimizes the number of calls we are taking.

### Data Analysis

We are taking an average of 2847 calls daily with a staff of 32 agents. That does not factor in attendance on any given day and a fourth of them being new hires and trainees. On average we have 22 vacant positions and 8 agents on leave at a time.

There are several contributing factors causing us not reaching our goal. A fourth of our staff is new and turnover is at 69% which causes us to have a new training class almost every hiring cycle. This prevents us from offering additional training to agents who are currently here and need the ongoing support. Low staffing and undertrained staff play a major role in longer wait times for the customers. January 21, 2022, on most of the state's "snow day" we tried right sizing our queues. What this means is we are only allowing the same number of calls to be presented according to the number of agents present that day. For example, if we have 10 agents on a skill (call line for a particular subject) we will only allow 10 calls to come through at a time. We found on the snow day that this allowed the agents to handle calls without having a customer wait on the line for 15 minutes. Agents are not to allow the customer wait time to go over 15 minutes on this option line. Normally we have 100 calls waiting at a time, sometimes for 45 minutes or more. This allowed us to primarily open our option queue which takes customers to a live agent. We are offering call backs as well but because the option line is open, many

customers would prefer to hold. The negative side to this is that our queue size is smaller, and many customers are not able to get through to an agent or request a call back depending on how many have already entered our system.

### Implementation

With the help of the South Carolina Department of Employment Workforce we have participated in five job fairs and were able to hire 22 candidates. While some are no longer here, almost half of them are still employed and most are meeting production standards. We are still recruiting here at the agency as well.

Although we are faced with a high turnover rate, holding our current staff accountable for their attendance issues is top priority. We keep track of their unscheduled leave and remind them of the verbiage from our agencies attendance policy by following our progressive disciplinary process when needed.

In January 2022, the training manuals were completed by me, our chief, and quality manager in the contact center. We met every other week to discuss ideas and the direction we wish to see our training go in. To test the theory, I have provided the updated vehicle training manual to my current agents to use as a resource and they have said it has been very helpful. We have hired a new training manager with a fresh set of eyes to revamp our training program to be implemented as more hands on and applied skill. Training plays a key role in the implementation to reduce the number of repeat callers that we have whose issue was not resolved with their first call. Agents who are better trained and more knowledgeable will make for a lower call handling time and it will be easier for the agents to maintain their service level within the standards set.

Since January 21 we have continued to size our queues to accommodate our current staffing level. We have allowed each queue to hold 30 calls on the vehicle and driver line, and our financial responsibility line which receives fewer calls with 20 at a time. Due to staffing and new hires, the highest wait time on our option line has reached is 20 minutes. When the wait time has peaked the supervisors and managers are to step in and help reduce the wait time. We do this by answering calls from the middle of our queue where calls waiting under ten minutes while the agents are handling the calls at the top which helps us create a gap in the calls, catch up, and manage the wait time of under 15 minutes. This past week along with the 30 option calls available we have opened our call back queue to allow those that wish a call back to get one. Our driver queue has reached a 40-minute wait time while financial responsibility and vehicle have maintained their queue with a desirable wait time. I can manage this on my team by recognizing my key performers and those that manage option calls better than the call backs.

We now stop our calls from coming in at 4:30 pm which allows agents time once the call queues are cleared. We use this time follow up with any issues they have, return calls, and close out old call center tickets while alleviating the amount of time they are off the phone during the day. This allows the agents to take more calls because they would have taken another five minutes to call a customer back or make a ticket. This also allows the agent to decompress from the day as it can be stressful at times because we are a high-volume call center.

I have suggested to our Deputy Director that we create a position whose sole purpose is to manage our phone system throughout the day. Their job would include managing the queue size according to staffing, identify any issues with the phone system, and monitor the calls to suggest changes to our current process that would continuously improve our call taking



strategies. This employee or employees would be able to identify peak times to assist with our staffing needs as well.

### Summary

I plan to play a role in efficiently improving our contact center by continuously educating my team and others in need. It is vital that we continuously train because laws change all the time as well as procedures. The high call volume we cannot change; but how it's handled, we can. We are committed to hiring new employees and monitoring the progress of our current staff. Recognizing those that don't have a desire to be here initially and handling that appropriately, while also recognizing those key performers and rewarding them. Being properly staffed is our biggest challenge, but we also need to be productive with what we currently have.

We continue to stop the calls at 4:30 pm and recently took the approach of having the agents wrap up the day's issues rather than taking time off the phone during the day to do so. We are monitoring this closely as we have only been able to do this in the past week.

#### My Plan:

- Continuous evaluation of our training within the contact center and integrating agency training.
- Effective recruitment

- Right sizing the queues according to staffing for the day
- Continue to stop calls at 4:30
- Hire a system operator whose sole purpose is the managing the phone system
- Time Frame August 2021-August 2022

## APPENDIX A

Figure A-1 Staffing

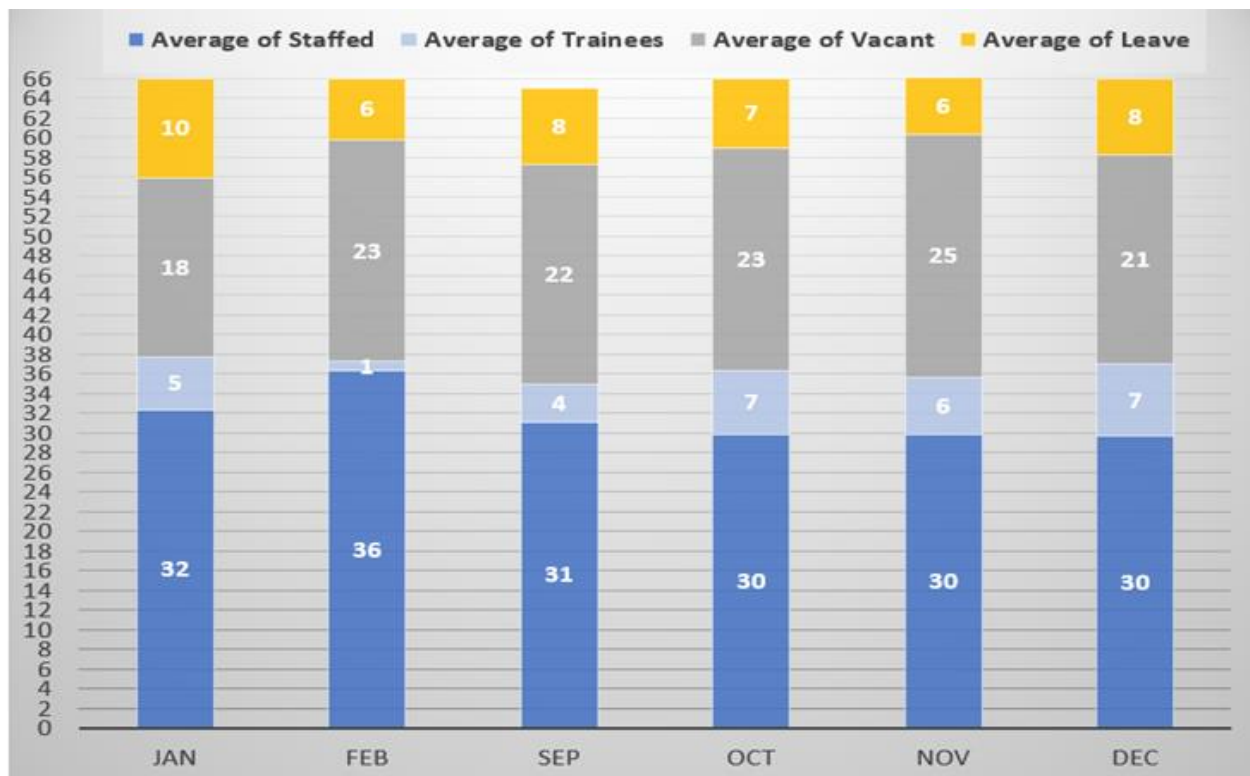


Figure A-2 Agent Activity Report

Date and Time	Name	ACD Calls	Short Duration Calls	Calls Completed in Service Level	Bounced Calls	Transferred Calls	Long Hold Bounced Calls	Escalated Calls	Emergency Calls
02/04/2022, 12:00 AM	Ivory, Estes	114	2	102	14	1	0	0	0
Report Summary	Ivory, Estes	114	2	102	14	1	0	0	0

Figure A-3 Daily Average Calls Handled

